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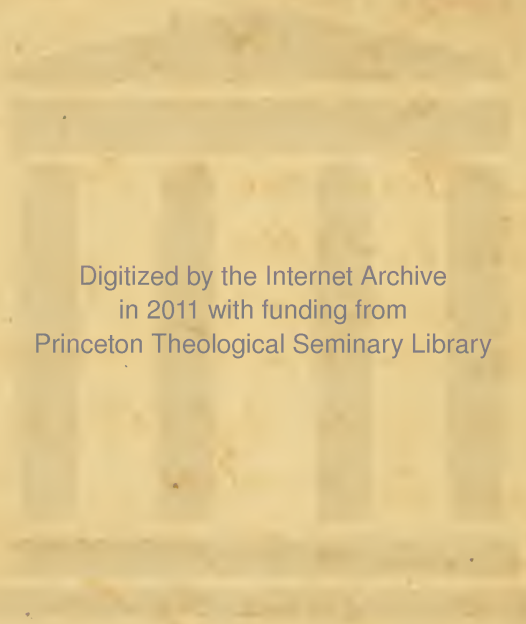
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Index

Page

God's gracious covenant
with believers, by Rev.
John H. Church - - - 1

Sermon on the settlement
of New England, by Rev.
John H. Church - - - 93

Fast Sermon, by Rev.
John E. Latta - - -

The Faithful Steward
by the Rev. Archibald Cameron -
Epistle to the Baptists by
James Bickherstaff - - -

Sermon on the preciousness
of redemption by Rev.
Gershom Williams - - -

Nature & constitution
of the Christian Church
by William Stevens Esq. -

Covenant Interest of the
Children of Believers by
Rev. Amzi Lewis - - -

Sermon on the real christian
distinguished from
hypocrites by the Rev.
Thomas Davidson - -

THE REAL *CHRISTIAN* DISTINGUISHED FROM
HYPOCRITES.

IN A

DISCOURSE,

FROM

REVELATIONS,

chap. iii. 1.

By Rev. THOMAS DAVIDSON, A. M.
Minister of Braintree, England.

PUBLISHED IN SCOTLAND, BY A SOCIETY FOR
DISSEMINATING RELIGIOUS TRACTS.



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THE following Discourse was published in Scotland, in 1798, by "The Society for publishing Religious Tracts," instituted in July 1793, consisting of 250 Members. The object of this Society is to publish and distribute such Tracts as appear calculated to promote evangelical knowledge and holiness.

From a fund raised partly by a quarterly subscription of the Members, and partly by donations, the Society, in the course of the first five years after its establishment, printed and circulated large editions of TWENTY SEVEN different pamphlets, of which that herewith presented to the public, was one.

DISCOURSE, &c.

REV. iii. 1.

And unto the angel of the Church in Sardis write, These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead, &c.

THIS charge respects private Christians, for it is brought against the church as well as the minister : and in treating of this part of the subject, I shall set it before you in a two fold point of view. First, as strictly and absolutely true with respect to some ; and, secondly, as only comparatively true with respect to others.

First, It may be considered as strictly and absolutely true with respect to some, that they have a name to live and are dead. This natively leads us to consider the dreadful nature of the sin of hypocrisy, and the awful condition of hypocrites ; for none but such can possibly have a name to live among men, and yet be absolutely dead in the sight of God. Now, that I may, if possible, meet with every one in such a condition, I would observe, that there are three sorts of hypocrites.

1. Such as may properly be called *legal hypocrites*, whose name to live, and whose hopes, are wholly built on the works of the law ; who reckon a great deal on their negative goodness, and are ready to say with the Pharisee, Luke xviii. 11. *God I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican.* To this may be added, what may very properly, in one sense, be called *positive goodness* ; such as being strictly honest and just in all their dealings with men ; who would not, for any consideration, wrong any one to the value of a pin, are compassionate and merciful to the poor, and on all proper occasions give liberally

to their relief, according to their ability ; lay out themselves to be useful among men, and to their utmost promote peace and harmony in societies and neighbourhoods ; and to all this may be added, being strict in the practice of religious duties of every kind, public, private and secret ; and yet, with all this negative and positive goodness, there may be nothing but the form of godliness without any thing of its life and power ; for if persons trust to this, and look to be saved by it, either in whole or in part, they, in so far, put it in the room of Christ and his righteousness, who in no case will share his glory with creatures, but will have all saved in the way that stains the pride of all glory. The apostle Paul tells us this was his case before his mind was savingly enlightened : he was one of the legal hypocrites of whom I am now speaking. *I was alive*, says he, Rom. vii. 9. *without the law once* ; alive, that is, in his own opinion, and in the opinion of others, *without the law* ; that is, before he knew the law in its spiritual meaning and extent : *but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died*. Then the hopes he had founded on the law, concerning the righteousness of which, he tells us elsewhere, he was blameless in his own conceit, Phil. iii. 6. were rooted up, and he saw that, though he had a name to live, he was notwithstanding dead. In like manner, all who build on the same rotten foundation, whatever their attainments may be, either in moral or religious life, let them come to ever such a seeming degree of perfection, if they rest there, and go no further ; yea, if they go not beyond and out of them all to Christ, and rest on his righteousness alone for justification before God, they are no more living christians in his sight, than a well drawn picture is a living man. They appear to be what they really are not ; they have a name to live among men, but they are dead, as being destitute of the spiritual life, destitute of a new nature, without which our Lord has assured us none can enter into the kingdom of God. John iii. 3,—5.

2. There are some who are gross, designing, and presumptuous hypocrites ; who put on the cloak of religion, and wear it, that they may be thought well of by men ; who know they are not what they pretend to be, as being conscious to themselves that they have no ends and motives in view, but what are carnal, worldly and selfish ; such a one was Judas in our Lord's own family. *Have not I chosen you twelve, and one*

of you is a devil? John vi. 70. Such a one was Simon the magician, of whom we read, Acts viii. who put on a profession of religion, and followed the apostles, from worldly motives, hoping to obtain the same power which he saw they were endowed with, of conveying the Holy Ghost through the laying on of their hands, that he might turn this gift into worldly gain, as is evident from his offering the apostles money that he might obtain it. Such also were Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v. who had got admittance into the church, and seeing how light the Christians of those days set by this world, and how readily they sold and parted with their estates for the relief of their brethren, would fain have got a name to themselves, for the same contempt of the world, and love to the saints, while the covetous love of the world reigned in their hearts, and they could not but be conscious to themselves that they were lying to God and his church in the profession which they made, as was made evident in an awful manner.

It is truly surprising to think, what pains some have been at to put on and wear the mask of religion by an outward profession ; to personate the walk and conversation of Christians, that they might be accounted such : and some have gone dreadful lengths in acting their part so artfully, that they have deceived even the most discerning Christians and ministers : and yet, at the same time, they have been and could not but be conscious to themselves, (as their after practice has declared,) that they were acting a deceitful and hypocritical part ; and that, at the same time they were pretending to the greatest measures of sanctity and strictness before men, their hearts were giving the lie to it all : while they were indulging the love of sin, and saying, *I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart*, Deut. xxix. 19. Some particular instances of this kind there have been, that would fill every mind with astonishment to relate them. And though, for the most part, such have been detested, by their being left to make awful discoveries of the naughtiness and rottenness of their hearts, and thereby have been made monuments of the Divine displeasure, and set up as beacons to others ; yet I question not, but some such have worn the mask all their life, and their hypocrisy has never been discovered in this world, and will not be made evident but in the next. This I take to be the meaning of that awful word of our Lord's, Luke xiii. 30. *And behold there are last which shall be first, and there are first that shall be last.*

Before I leave this, and go any further, may we not stop here, and wonder at the degree of atheism, hellish wickedness, and heaven daring presumption, which such persons have arrived at, as thus to put on a character and act a part in it, quite contrary to the natural bent and disposition of their hearts, which the profession of religion puts a force upon, a disposition that strongly inclines them to the ways of the world lying in wickedness, all which they cannot but be conscious of, if they ever allow conscience to speak, and hearken to what it says? And at the same time, they cannot but know, that however they thus deceive men, who are bound by the law of love to think the best of persons, that the present appearance they make can suggest to them, yet they cannot, I say, but know that the mask will certainly be taken off, if not in this world, yet in the other, to their eternal shame and confusion. But Oh! what a mystery of wickedness is there in the heart of man by nature! Surely it is an eternal truth, it is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; none can know it, but God, whose understanding is infinite, Jer. xvii. 9.

3. There are close, painted hypocrites, who may not only deceive others, who can see no farther than outward appearance, and are bound to judge of them accordingly; but they may even go so far as to deceive themselves. This is a delicate point, and had need to be tenderly handled; for it is attended with a three fold difficulty.

(1.) In many cases, the real graces of true Christians, and the counterfeit ones in refined hypocrites, so nearly resemble one another, that it requires no small measure of the wisdom that cometh from above to distinguish rightly between them, and to point out precisely where the difference lies.

(2.) When we would aim at dealing faithfully in this matter, that so we may cut off all excuses from the most refined hypocrites, that they may not have it to say, the danger of our case was never fully displayed to us, the deceits and refuges of lies to which we trusted were never fully laid open to us, otherwise we might have escaped them. Now, I say, it is difficult to cut off all excuses of this kind; and yet not grieve and wound the heart of any of God's dear children; for many of them are so borne down in their spirits with unbelief, the remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of Satan, that they are ready to apply every thing that is spoken

to the case now under consideration to themselves, and to conclude that they are nothing but hypocrites : and the enemy frequently drives temptations of this kind with such hellish violence in upon their minds, that if he cannot bereave them of their grace, which, blessed be God, is beyond the power of hell, he does all he can to bereave them of their comfort and joy, and makes them many times to walk with bowed down backs and wounded spirits ; so that, between these two, to deal faithfully with the one, and not to grieve the other, lies no small difficulty.

(3.) Another difficulty lies in this, the subject itself is copious, and would bear to be largely handled, which the brevity we are confined to in discourses of this kind, will not admit of, and to draw out a subject to any considerable length, has sometimes a tendency to make persons tired of it ; and by this means the things spoken, however weighty in themselves, are not duly attended to. Whoever considers these three difficulties, will see, that they do not want their own weight. May the Lord direct to what may be proper, pertinent, and useful on this subject. I but just now observed, that the kind of hypocrisy of which I am now treating, is of so refined a nature, that persons may not only deceive others, but even themselves ; that is, though they have a name to live among men, they may, notwithstanding, be dead before God, and yet not know it ; yea, they may have a kind of persuasion that it is otherwise ; and Oh what a dreadful thing it is to be deceived in a matter of eternal moment and consequence ! to be deceived with respect to the real state of one's soul ! Verily, they who are deceived in this, are deceived indeed. Several things concur to lead persons into this deceit, and to make them a more refined kind of hypocrites ; such as,

1. A religious and sober education in which persons have had precept and example concurring to lead them into at least an outward profession of religion, by a punctual attendance on all the ordinances of worship, and an observation of the more secret duties of religion, which can hardly be done without abstaining from the more gross pollutions of the world, and being morally sober. It is impossible for persons to go thus far, without being commended and well thought of by religious persons, who are always willing to think and hope the best in such cases ; and this meeting with the natural pride of the heart, has a tendency to make them think the best of them-

selves too ; and thus they are insensibly led into the having a name to live, while they are dead, and have never experienced any real gracious change on their hearts.

2. To this may be added, a great deal of light and knowledge as to the doctrines of the gospel and the only way of salvation through Christ, of which they may have a rational kind of belief, to which they have been led by no higher principle than that of education and the impressions which that leaves on the mind. Such a knowledge is commendable in itself ; but where the mind is not under the influence of grace, it has a tendency to puff up and make one vain, as it draws forth commendations and praises from others, of the dangers of which few are sufficiently aware, and fewer still guard against it : for knowledge, however extensive it may be, is not grace. Many a knowing, yea, many an orthodox head has been joined to a graceless heart, Rom. ii. 17.

3. Such persons may also be possessed of considerable gifts for the edification of others : may be able to talk of the things of God greatly to edification. They may have surprising memories, so as to retain, and be able to repeat what they read and hear, may have the gift of prayer to a wonderful degree, and many other excellent qualifications, which may contribute to procure them a name to live among men, and to make them think themselves alive, whilst yet they are dead. The apostle supposes, Cor. xiii. 1. that persons may have gifts to such a degree as to speak as it were with the tongues of men and angels, to be able to prophecy, to understand all mysteries, and yet have no grace, but be utter strangers to the power of religion.

4. Over and above all this, something may pass on the minds of such persons, through the common operations of the Spirit of God, nearly resembling his special and saving work on the minds of his people, while they are only enlightened professors ; such strong and piercing convictions for sin, as we are sure Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, Judas and Festus had ; a wonderful moving of affections in reading and hearing the word in secret prayer, and other religious duties, as the stony ground hearers, who received the word with joy ; on this may follow a great outward reformation, and forsaking of sins which formerly were delighted in, and a cleaving to duties of every kind, moral and religious, as Herod when he heard John, he heard him gladly, and did many things ; yea, there may be

something resembling the several graces of the Spirit found in hypocrites and mere formalists. Have the children of God faith ? so may they have a temporary kind of faith. We read of some *who stayed themselves on the God of Israel*, but it was *not in truth and righteousness*, Isa. xlviii. 2. Simon the magician, Acts viii. it is said *believed also* ; but it was not to the saving of the soul, as the event fully proved. Do true Christians repent ? so may hypocrites ; Ahab repented and humbled himself, Judas also repented ; but it was not a true and gracious sorrow in any of them, but only a slavish fear of the punishment of sin, in an awakened conscience. Have true Christians hope ? so may the hypocrite, but it is only for a moment, and *shall perish*, Job. viii. 13. Again, they may feel something like the struggles between the new and old man in the believers ; but it is only either one lust striving against another, as sometimes lusts are contrary one to another, or, as one well observes, it is only the flesh lusting in one part of the flesh, and fearing in another, as was the case with Balaam. He had strong desires after the wages of unrighteousness, but his light and knowledge told him the danger of taking them : and many have struggles of the same kind, who yet remain utter strangers to a work of grace on the heart. Further, they may have good desires, as Esau, who earnestly sought the blessing with tears. Balaam too could say, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his*, Num. xxiii. 10. And Simon the magician, when the danger of his unconverted state was faithfully told him, desired the apostle's prayers for him, Acts viii. 24. yea, they may strive against sin, and seem very mortified, as many among the Papists do in an ignorant self-righteous way. Thus, Ahab humbled himself, rent his clothes, fasted, lay in sackcloth, and went softly, 1 Kings xxi. 27. What shall I say further ? They may take a great delight in ordinances, attend punctually on them, and seem greatly affected while they do so. Thus it was with those spoken of, Isa. lviii. 2. *They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God ; they ask of me the ordinances of justice, and they take delight in approaching to God, &c.* What a beautiful appearance does all this make ? But, alas ! it was all hypocrisy, as the context makes evident. I might enlarge on this subject ; but these things may suffice to prove this affecting truth.

And now, if any are ready to say, Why, if hypocrites can,

go all these lengths, how is true religion to be discerned? and how may we know the difference? In answer to this, I would say, there are three things to which the most refined hypocrite never attains, and where these three things are to be found, there most certainly is the grace of God in reality and truth.

1. They never give up with all sin, nor hate it as sin. Some, yea, many sins, they may seem to forsake, while convictions continue; as Herod, when he heard John, heard him gladly, and did many things: but, with all this he could not be brought to part with his Herodias. And thus it is with hypocrites, even the most refined of them; they always retain some idol or other, that they cannot bear should be cut off, some right eye, that they cannot or rather will not pluck out. And allow me to say, brethren, if it was possible for one to part with all sins, except one, that one would give Satan as real a hold of his heart, as if he had parted with none. But the true Christian is made to see so much of the loathsome and filthy nature of sin, as well as to behold its dreadful consequences, that he hates and gives up with all sin, and is so far from desiring any may be spared, that he dreads, lest it should be so, through the deceitfulness of sin, and his own heart. And the person that can appeal to God, the Searcher of hearts, and say unto him, with the Psalmist, Psal. cxix. 128. *I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way*, has attained to something in which he has got beyond the most refined hypocrite.

2. They never love to be searched to the bottom; they are always afraid of it, and seek to avoid it; they love fair generals best, and always avoid any thing that looks like being too particular. But the true, the honest hearted Christian is willing to be searched thoroughly, yea, is afraid lest any sin should lurk in his heart without being observed; and therefore, as suspecting himself of partiality in this matter, he brings his heart to God, who knows it best, and puts the work in his hand, saying with the Psalmist, cxxxix. 23, 24. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, &c.*

3. They never wholly renounce self in the matter of justification, and rest wholly upon the merits of Christ and his righteousness for complete salvation. Some may indeed seem to do it in opinion, but in practice there is always something

of their own, which they cleave to and rest upon, if not wholly, yet in part, as they who are mentioned in the forecited Isa. lviii. 3. *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not ? &c. I fast twice a week, I pay tithes of all I possess*, said the Pharisee, Luke xviii. 12. But the true Christian, in the matter of justification, dares not mix any thing of his own with the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he desires, with the apostle, to be *found in him, not having his own righteousness*, &c. Phil. iii. 9.

By these three things, we may know the difference between true Christians and the most refined hypocrites ; and if we have truly experienced these things, we may be assured we are true and honest hearted Christians. I come now,

Secondly, To consider this charge as comparatively true with respect to others, namely, true believers, who may have had, and perhaps have still a name to live, that is, may be accounted lively and flourishing christians by others, and yet their souls may be in a very languishing condition before God. And O the need we all have to consider and listen to this with becoming seriousness and attention !

That the words of the text are to be taken in this restricted sense, is, I think, evident from the advice or exhortation given in the text, *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, and are ready to die*. In treating them, therefore, in this view, I shall, through divine assistance, 1st, Show when it may be said that a true Christian has a name to live and yet in a sense is dead ; 2dly, Shall point out some of the causes of this evil.

1st, When may it be said that a true Christian has a name to live, and yet may, in the sense of the text, be dead.

I answer, 1. When he has lost his first love, and has not that relish and savour of divine things he once had. It is usual, when persons are first savingly dealt with, and made to experience what the Scripture calls the kindness of youth, and the love of espousals, that then their hearts are lively and spiritual, and they have warm impressions of the love of God in Christ, which render the duties of worship sweet, and engaging in them easy and pleasant : then love to him is strong, and love to every thing that is his too, as his name, his word, his day, his ordinances, and his people. It is impossible persons can have this love and not show it ; the holy profession, in its own nature, makes this necessary ; and, in so far as it is

thewn in a way becoming the gospel, it must procure them a name to live. But this name to live is more easily maintained than one's first love is : for the avoiding things that are openly and notoriously scandalous, and a strict attendance on the ordinances and duties of worship, will maintain the one ; but nothing can maintain the other, but the immediate communications of the Spirit and grace of Christ, in a way of holy fellowship with God in him. But Oh what a sad falling off is frequently to be found here with many of God's children ! especially if any considerable measure of worldly prosperity and ease happens to be in their lot. It is natural for the carnal unrenewed part of the mind to sink into things of time and sense, and in so far as an inordinate love to them prevails, the love of God and things spiritual must in proportion sink and grow weaker ; by which means Christians fall from and leave their first love. The earnestness of their desires towards God and the remembrance of his name, their zeal for his glory and honor and the interests of his kingdom ; their fervent breathings after communion and fellowship with him in the duties and ordinances of worship ; their love to his word, his day and people : all these may abate and cool to a degree that should rather be imagined than spoken. The edge of their spiritual desires may be blunted ; the tender spiritual frame of mind, with which they once engaged in duties of worship, may, in a great measure, wear off ; that careful watch which they formerly kept up against vanity and carnality of mind, may be let down in a great measure ; and though they may keep up the form of religion so as to maintain the name to live among men, yet they may in a great measure be dead before God, dead in comparison of what they once were, when they first engaged in the ways of God and religion. There are instances in Scripture of saints leaving their first love, which should be remembered with fear and trembling by us all. Would one have thought that such a man as Noah, a preacher of righteousness, for such a number of years, to a wicked and ungodly world, who was a just man and perfect in his generation, and walked with God, Gen. vi. 9. and whom the Lord said he had seen righteous before him in his generation, Gen. vii. 1. and whom the Lord had so wonderfully and mercifully preserved when he drowned the world of the ungodly by the flood : would one have thought I say, that such a one, after all this, would have fallen as he

did ? Joseph was tender, holy and circumspect in his younger years, and when in adversity ; but when he was surrounded with the temptations of a court, and was raised to a fullness of riches and power, he left his first love, so far as to learn to swear the court oath. What a difference was there between David's first and his last days ! sometimes one would hardly think it was the same man. These, and other instances that might be named, are sufficient to fill us all with holy fear, and to make us remember that great truth, we stand by faith, and therefore we should not be high minded, and that while we think we stand to take heed lest we fall, fall from our first love, and thereby, though we may have a name to live, yet may in the sense before declared be dead. Then may we be brought to mourn in the language of Job, xxix. 2. *Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness, as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle.*

2. When he is more anxious and careful in maintaining the credit of his profession before men, than in maintaining communion and fellowship with God in the more secret duties of religion. I grant indeed this can never be strictly and absolutely true in the fullest meaning of these words, that any child of God can be more anxious and concerned about the one than the other ; on the contrary, this is the certain mark of a hypocrite : but in a time of temptation and spiritual declension, from the danger of which none are absolutely exempted, even true Christians may feel this disposition working in them. There may be a going the round of duties, public, private, and secret, a blameless outward walk, by abstaining from such things as may sully their profession, and bring reproach on the good ways of God ; there may be a good measure too of the exercise of gifts for the edification of others, while yet grace may be on the decline. And as these things may have a tendency to maintain and strengthen the credit of one's profession before men, Christians may for some time be under the temptation of being more careful about this, than about maintaining communion with God in secret ; and this may be occasioned by their giving way to things that have provoked God to hide his face from them in the more secret duties of worship, by which they contract a dead, formal, listless way of performing such duties, while there may be seem-

ing liveliness in the way of performing religious duties before men, perhaps through the mere force of a natural gift, or a spiritual one used in a formal way. But to be sure, where this is the case, they are not before God what they appear to be before men, though they may have a name for being lively and spiritual Christians, by the account of them that can see no farther than outward appearance, and must therefore judge accordingly; yet they are not so before God, but comparatively speaking dead.

3. When the inward temper and frame of his mind, and the tenor of his walk and conversation, are not as it becomes the gospel of Christ, and the holy profession of his name. That one may be a true Christian with respect to his state before God, and be justly accounted so by men, and yet the inward frame of his mind be such as is in a great measure, unbecoming that character, none can doubt who know the word of God, and are thoroughly acquainted with their own hearts. He may give way to pride, anger, malice and a revengeful spirit for a time; may fret and repine inwardly at the providence of God, and some particular dispensations thereof: he may indulge a carnal frame of mind, and think with some pleasure on the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. All this may be done, and yet nothing scandalous appearing before men; but it cannot be done without bringing on spiritual deadness on the mind, and unfitting it for communion with God in holy duties. Yea, matters may even go further; true Christians may be suffered to fall into things in point of practice, that, if they are not inconsistent with the being and truth of grace, are utterly inconsistent with the lively exercise of it, and thereby they may darken their profession, and sully the lustre of it, to such a degree, that they may at least be no ornaments to it. Yea, what shall I say further? may not my heart tremble to say, and yours to hear, that they may be left to go so far, as to become open scandals to the gospel, and oblige the children of God, with whom they have formerly been in church-fellowship to withdraw from them, and to separate them from the holy communion of the saints? And though a true Christian can never fall totally and finally from grace as to the habit or reality of it, in the heart, yet he may fall from the exercise of it, so that he may lose, as to his own apprehension, his assurance of the love of God, joy in the Holy Ghost. peace of conscience and

the hope of heaven. And there may be also sad and woful intermissions as to the acts or exercises of the graces which are essential to Christianity, viz. faith, repentance and love. He may be left to go so far, that his grace may neither be visible to himself nor to others. By all which God may be provoked to hide his face from him, and leave him to sink in a cloud, and go out like the snuff of a candle; and in many awful instances, he may take vengeance on his inventions, though he shew smercy to his soul as to its eternal well-being.

Thus far even Christians may have a name to live and yet be partially dead: and I have been thus particular with a two fold view, (1.) That none may give way to unbelief and despair, by drawing harsh conclusions against themselves, as if they were none of the children of God, because perhaps they may have fallen in the way and manner I have been now describing. Let such remember and hear the Lord speaking to them in such words as these: Psal. lxxxix. 30.—35. Jer. iii. 11, 12, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22. Hof. xiv. 1, 2, 3, 4. (2.) That none may presume, but that all may be afraid and keep at the utmost distance from every thing that so much as borders on the evils I have been describing in the foregoing particulars. Woe to them who dare fearlessly venture on such things, because they hear persons may be guilty of them, and yet be saved. This is so far from being a mark of a child of God, that it is one of the saddest marks of presumption, yea, of reprobation, that I know. Would any wise man leap over a precipice, because he saw another do it before him, and did not lose his life, but only broke some bones; surely no. The application is easy. O let us stand in awe, and be afraid of having a name to live, and yet being dead, either in one respect or another.

Secondly, I would point out some causes of this.

1. It is owing to much outward prosperity, and to an abundance of the means of grace. In times of public persecution and famine of the word of God, Christians have something to exercise their graces and keep them lively, and generally speaking they are lively. But in a time of much outward tranquillity and plenty of the means of grace, they are ready to grow secure, formal and dead, to settle on their lees, and to rest too much on a name to live. While David was hunted like a partridge on the mountains, and banished from the sanctuary, how lively were his affections! how fervent his de-

fires ! how ardent was his love to God and things spiritual ! But when he was in the midst of worldly prosperity and greatness, his heart turned carnal and dead, the consequences of which are too well known to be mentioned.

2. It is owing frequently to covetousness and the love of this world. Alas, my brethren, we live in an age and time in which it is a hard matter to convince persons that this is a sin, or at least that they are guilty of it. That which would have been, and certainly was accounted a scandalous sin in the first ages of Christianity, now sets up its head, even in the churches of Christ, without being ashamed, as if it had got a passport, and might safely go free, without being asked whence it came, or whither it was going ; yea, the very mentioning of it is ready sometimes to put persons out of temper, to put them in a passion, which is a certain sign that there is a sore there that cannot bear to be touched. And there are so many fine names that it goes by, and specious like disguises that it lurks under, that it finds a way, some how or other, to evade the force of conviction. But he who says in the text, *I know thy works*, sees through all these disguises, and sooner or later will blow them away with the breath of his mouth, and make the shame and nakedness of it appear to all. And though persons may now industriously hide it, and may find it no difficult thing to indulge it, and yet maintain a name to live, yet certainly, in so far as it is indulged, it brings spiritual deadness on the soul.

3. It is owing to the carnal and selfish way of using spiritual gifts. Where these are bestowed on persons in any measure more than common, it is hard for them to be in the exercise of them, and at the same time to keep down pride. Such gifts, and the free exercise of them, have a natural tendency to procure and increase a name to live ; but unless there be a balance laid on the natural pride of the mind, and persons are enabled by grace to exercise every gift God has bestowed on them, in a humble self-denied manner, as pride and self conceit prevail, spiritual deadness will also, in equal proportion, take place in the soul. Oh what need we have to remember that great word, 2 Cor. x. 17, 18. *He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord ; for not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*

4. It is owing to persons allowing their hearts to become carnal and sensual in the enjoyment of the lawful comforts of

life. Even the best of God's children are in danger here. Hence our Lord cautioned his disciples. Luke xxi. 34. *Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your heart be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, &c.* How necessary to watch over ourselves in this particular, and to beware of so much as bordering on excess of any kind ; for it is a stealing and bewitching thing, that insensibly increases in its demands ; and if once given way to, persons know not where they may stop. O the need we have to be spiritual in the use of all the lawful comforts of life, and to remember that weighty word. 1 Cor. x. 31. *Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* The not remembering this, and going to excess in these things, has clouded many a bright profession, and brought on spiritual deadness, which has never been altogether recovered in this world.

Lastly, it is owing to persons being seldom employed in the more inward and secret duties of religion, such as holy meditation, self examination, fasting and secret prayer. Some persons, in the heat of I don't know what kind of zeal, may exclaim against the diligent performance of such kind of duties, as favouring of a Pharisaical, self righteous spirit ; but whatever they may pretend, we may venture to affirm, on the justest grounds, that a defect in these duties is at the bottom of all the spiritual deadness to be found among us. The life of religion is an inward thing ; much of it lies between God and the soul, in secret ; and if persons either neglect, or carelessly perform, the more inward and secret duties of religion, by which communion and fellowship between God and the soul is maintained ; how is it possible such can be lively ? If God, of his infinite mercy, would graciously pour down his Spirit from on high on us, as a spirit of faith, repentance, grace and supplication, that would soon make a sweet and blessed change in our spiritual state and condition ; and this change would soon discover itself in the conscientious and diligent practice of that part of religion which lies between God and the soul in secret.

APPLICATION. *Use* 1. Of Information.

1. Hence we may see what a wide difference there is between the judgment of God, and the judgment of men, both with respect to persons and things. The one is frequently

false and partial, and at best is founded on probability and outward appearance ; but the other is according to truth, and founded on infallible knowledge, 1 Sam. xvi. 7. Sometimes even charity itself requires, that we should judge otherwise of persons, than according to what is their real state before God, because the entering into and judging the hearts of men, is a part of the prerogative royal of God, which he will suffer no person whatever to invade ; and therefore we ought to keep at the utmost distance from every thing that so much as borders on it, keeping within the bounds which the law of love has set us. But the use which we ought to make of this truth with respect to ourselves, is to look narrowly into, and to judge our own hearts and ways ; for that we are not only allowed to do, but it is our express duty ; and the not doing it, argues a sinful partiality and carelessness, which is frequently reprov'd in Scripture, 1 Cor. xi. 28, 31, 32. And the more we are thus employed, the less we shall be taken with a name to live among men, and being well thought of by them ; and the more we shall be desirous of approving ourselves unto God in all things, that we may in truth and reality be such as we profess to be : for it is not he that commendeth himself, or whom men commend, that is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth, 2 Cor. x. 18.

2. Hence we may see what a mercy it is for persons to have a true and real representation of their case laid before them, without any disguise ; especially when it is designed for their good, and to deliver them from any measure of misery they are labouring under. All the representations that are made by the Spirit of God in his word to sinners are of this nature, they are made with a design to undeceive them, by opening their eyes to see what is the real state of their souls before God, and at the same time he sets before them the remedy, and tells them how they may be delivered from every evil and misery they labor under. And here lies the main and chief difference between the way in which the Holy Spirit of God deals with the souls of men, and that which the liar and murderer takes. The devil does all he can to deceive sinners by blind folding them and keeping them in the dark, that they may not see the danger they are in, telling them all is well, and all shall be well with them in the issue, they shall not surely die. But when the sinner's eyes begin to be opened, and he can do that no longer, if then he speaks

truths, it is always with an evil and wicked design ; even that he may thereby complete the ruin of the soul, by driving it to despair, and telling them there is no hope for any in their case. But the Holy Spirit of God takes a course directly contrary to this in every respect ; he deals truly with all, by setting before them a fair state of their case, making it neither better nor worse than it really is, and that with a view to humble them, and make them sensible of the evil and danger of it ; and then he discovers the remedy, that they may flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them, that sin may not be their ruin, but that they may be delivered from it, and from the wrath which is to come. Hence it follows in the text, after the charge or accusation, ver. 2, 3. *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, &c.*

By noticing carefully what I have just now suggested on this point, we may easily know what comes from the Spirit of God, and what comes from the evil one, in the discoveries that are given of our hearts and ways. When the Spirit of God discovers our danger, it humbles to the dust, fills the soul with holy shame and blushing, and makes us cleave to the remedy, which he never fails to discover at the same time that he discovers the disease ; for that which comes from God, never fails to lead to him in a way of duty, and makes the soul cleave to him by faith and love. But when the devil sets before us the very same thing, *viz.* our sin and danger, though he may in this case speak truth and draw a true picture, though a horrid one, of ourselves, and set it before us, yet it is always with this design, to lead us to despair, and to make us draw that dreadful conclusion, that there is no hope or help for us in God. And O how ready are we to hearken to him in this, though it flies in the face of Scripture and the experience of the saints. It behoves us, therefore, to know and beware of his devices, that we may neither be betrayed out of our life, our joy, or our peace.

3. Hence we may see, that in a time of general declension in the churches of Christ, few, very few, either ministers or private Christians, altogether escape the contagion : but, on the contrary, the most part are ready to be carried down the stream. In this church of Sardis, we find, not only the angel or minister, but the greatest part of the church itself, charged with having a name to live and yet being dead, and there were but a few names among them that had not defiled

their garments. My brethren, this is a point that equally concerns, and therefore should affect us all. When things are evidently wrong in the churches, and seem to tend to utter ruin, it is an easy matter for persons to throw the blame off themselves, and lay it on others : yea, frequently none are more ready to do this, than they who are deepest in the provocation ; and sometimes none are more loudly exclaimed against, or have a greater share of the blame laid at their door, than the few names who have not defiled their garments. *Art thou he,* said Ahab to Elijah, *who troubleth Israel ?* 1. Kings, xviii. 17. Jeremiah was a man of strife and contention to his people, and was looked upon by the Jews as seeking their hurt and destruction. The plain reason of this is, because the lives and conversations of such are a practical reproof, and a standing testimony against backsliders and apostates, and therefore they endeavor to blacken and misrepresent them as much as possible. However, the improvement each of us should make of this point is, to turn inward, to search and try our own ways, and then to lay our hands on our hearts, and to say, what have I done ? None will be more ready to do so than they who are most holy, and tender, and circumspect ; and none stand fairer to be approved of God in the end, than they who are thus employed ; who are mourning in secret on account of their own sins, and the sins of others ; and are standing in the gap, to prevent the Lord's anger from breaking in like a flood. Blessed are such mourners ; for they shall be comforted.

4. Hence we may see what an awful and melancholy thing it is for persons to take up with a name to live while they are dead, absolutely and altogether dead, dead in trespasses and sins ; who have a form of godliness, but deny and are strangers to the power of it ; who profess to be the disciples of Jesus Christ, but in that profession are only deceiving themselves and others. It was no doubt a cutting word which our Lord spake to the traitor that betrayed him, *Friend, wherefore art thou come ? betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss ?* And O how dreadful will it be to such as have followed Judas in professing to be the friends of Christ, and have been accounted so by men, when the Lord comes to lay their real character open before men and angels, if they have not been left to make it manifest themselves, before they went out of the world, as Judas did ?

The improvement which all honest hearted Christians will make of this, will be to make them more earnestly solicitous to

search and try their own hearts, that they may see more into the deep deceitfulness thereof, and lest they should be deceived, (which of all other things they dread most,) they will be looking earnestly to God himself, and putting the work in his hand, saying, as in Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24. *Search me, O God, &c.*

5. Hence we may see, that it is not simply being in a gracious state will preserve persons from partial apostacy, and spiritual deadness in an hour of temptation. Times may pass over churches, even the purest of them, in which even real Christians, wise virgins, as well as foolish, may fall asleep, Matth. xxv. 8. And as it is not simply being in a gracious state will preserve persons from this evil, so neither is it the exercise of gifts or the maintaining a profession of religion before men: for some may have a high name in this respect, and yet their souls may be in a languishing condition before God. Nothing can preserve persons from the evils I now speak of, but the immediate and continued communications of the spirit and grace of the Lord Jesus: and we have no ground to expect such communications but in the way of holy fellowship with God in him, which never fails to be accompanied with a zealous regard to the truth as it is in Jesus, and a holy tender walk. These things God has joined together, and they who are for separating them, either in opinion or practice, to make way for an indulgence to lusts of any kind, spiritual deadness is creeping in upon them, rottenness is entering into their bones. And the use we should all make of this, we may see in that word, 1 Cor. x. 12. *Therefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*

Lastly, Hence we may see what reason the best of God's children have to take heed to themselves, and to beware of every thing that so much as borders on leaving or falling from their first love, or has a tendency to make them less tender and circumspect in their walk and conversation. The not adverting duly to this, has brought on spiritual deadness, on many a real Christian, from which they have never fully recovered in this world; but have gone halting to their graves. This truth stands confirmed, not only by many instances left on record in the holy Scripture, but also in the experience and observation of many in every age. O the need that all have to watch over their spirits and their ways, and walking in all holy conversation and godliness, to pass the time of their sojourning

in fear. Verily, it is impossible the spiritual life can be maintained with any comfortable measure of strength and vigor without it. They who think otherwise, and frame their conduct accordingly, do but deceive themselves, and are certainly in the snare of the devil. I conclude this use of information with that Scripture, Jude ver. 20 21. *But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*

A second use may be by way of *Lamentation*.

And here, my brethren, may we not, by looking around us, and taking a just survey of things, either with respect to the state of matters in the churches of Christ in general, or among ourselves in particular; may we not, I say, adopt and take up that lamentation of the prophet, Jer. ix. 1. *O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.* And Lam. iv. 1, 7. *How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, &c. their visage is blacker than a coal.* May we not say, *Wee is on us, our leanness, our leanness*, it riseth up and testifieth to our faces, what our spiritual state and condition is. When we look abroad to the state of the churches of Christ in general, or among ourselves, Oh what woful departures from the truth and holiness of the gospel, present themselves to us, to such a degree, that they must either be blind, or they must wink very hard, who do not see, and are not fully convinced of them. The enemy has, for several years, been breaking in like a flood, and seems to be aiming at sapping the very foundations of Christianity; and, alas, while he is thus sowing tares, are not the most part asleep? or at least very few jealous for the Lord God of hosts, and contending earnestly for the faith once committed to the saints? Jude, v. 3. And has not the consequence of this been a general looseness and untenderness of walk among professing Christians, to such a degree, that we are hardly to be known from the world lying in wickedness? May not our hearts, therefore, meditate terror, when we think what the end of these things may be? lest the Lord should be provoked to say concerning us, as of his people of old, Jer. v. 9. *Shall not I visit for these things, saith the Lord? and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*

And when we come nearer home, and view the state of matters in our own hearts, Oh what ground of humiliation and mourning have we? We have a name to live, it is true, and I trust there are more than a few names among us who are really alive and lively; but alas!—is there not much spiritual deadness and barrenness at the same time? Are there not many of whom it may be truly said they have left their first love; the zeal, the life, the tenderness of their youth is in a great measure gone. Alas, has not the pale and wan colour of death, come up into the faces of many who once appeared lively and spiritual? And how can it be otherwise, if persons have their hearts sinking into and racked with the cares and love of this world? or are indulging lusts and sensual gratifications of any kind in a sinful way? or are conforming themselves to the world in its vain and vile customs? Can grace grow and thrive in such persons? Is it possible that such can be lively and spiritual, and can maintain fellowship and communion with God in holy duties? Surely no. These things are for a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

Use 3. Of Exhortation.

From what has been said, let us all be exhorted to search and try our ways, that we may see whether or not, or how far the charge and accusation in the text belongs unto us; and who among us can say it does not? surely there are rare and happy souls, who are exceptions in this case. But, as I apprehend, it belongs in one respect or another to by far the greatest part, even of them who have a name to live among us, then it becomes us to take with it, and turn to the Lord from whom we have deeply revolted; and if we would do this to purpose, and in a right manner, it must be done.

1. In a believing way and manner. As faith is the mean of life at first, so it is the mean of quickening and reviving in all the fits of after deadness. Let us therefore bring our dead cold hearts to the quickening promises of the new covenant, and say unto the holy and quickening Spirit, as Psal. cxix. 25. *Our souls cleave unto the dust, quicken us, according to thy word.* Various are the promises which are made in the word to the present case. Ezek. xxxvii. 1,—15. is full to this purpose, so is also Hof. xiv. 6, 7. Let us firmly believe and plead these, and such like promises, with particular application to ourselves, and say with the church, Jer. iii. 22, *Behold we come unto thee, for*

thou art the Lord our God, and Hof. ii. 7. I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now.

2. With deep contrition and bitter repentance. This follows the other of course, and will be a certain proof of the truth and genuineness of our faith. They are both joined together, Joel ii. 12, 13. *Therefore, also now, saith the Lord, turn ye unto me, &c. with fasting and with weeping, and with mourning, and rent your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God, &c.*

3. With firm resolutions, in the strength of divine grace, to reform whatever we have seen and been convinced was wrong in our practice and walk, and with holy endeavours after new obedience. *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I will not offend any more; that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity I will do no more, Job xxxiv. 31 32.* This will indeed be a proof of our sincerity. It is only in so far as convictions and repentance operate in this manner that they are saving and efficacious.

WRITE to Sardis, (saith the Lord,)

And write what he declares,

He whose spirit, and whose word,

Upholds the seven stars :

“ All thy works and ways I search,

Find thy zeal and love decay'd ;

Thou art call'd a living church,

But thou art cold and dead.

Watch, remember, seek, and strive,

Exert thy former pains :

Let thy timely care revive,

And strengthen what remains :

Cleanse thine heart, thy works amend,

Former times to mind recal,

Lest my sudden stroke descend,

And smite thee once for all.

Yet I remember now in thee

A few that are upright ;

These my Father's face shall see,

And walk with me in white :

When in judgment I appear,

They for mine will be confest ;

Let my faithful servants hear,

And woe be to the rest.”







